

By Neal Goswami, Bennington Banner

Vermont Congressman Peter Welch says dozens of Vermont businesses could see a boon from energy legislation the U.S. House is expected to take up on Thursday.

The second-term Democrat said the Home Star Energy Retrofit Act will create up to 170,000 jobs across the country in construction, retail and manufacturing.

The legislation creates a national energy efficiency retrofit program to provide incentives to homeowners to reduce energy consumption. The bill would offer in-store rebates and incentives for whole-home retrofits, according to Welch, and could improve about three million homes and save \$10 billion over a decade.

Welch said Monday that the incentive program would boost hardware and other home performance stores throughout Vermont when the in-store rebates take effect. Among the local stores he said could benefit are:

\* H. Greenberg & Son, Inc. - Bennington

\* Weatherization Works - Dorset

\* Friends of the Sun - Manchester Center

\* R.K. Miles Inc. - Manchester Center

\* Hand Energy Services - Manchester Center

"Home Star will create good jobs for Bennington County's energy contractors, builders and

hardware store employees alike. At the same time, it will help homeowners from North Pownal to Manchester Center save money on their utility bills, while moving our country toward energy independence," Welch said.

The national program is similar to a statewide program in Vermont run by Efficiency Vermont, the first electrical efficiency utility of its kind. Welch, an early supporter of a retrofit incentive program, has lobbied the White House and fellow House members on the issue.

A more involved retrofitting plan is already part of a bill approved by the U.S. House last summer. Welch introduced the Retrofit for Energy and Environmental Performance program in March 2009 that passed the House last July as part of the American Clean Energy and Security Act, a sweeping climate change bill that includes a "cap and trade" plan. Action has stalled in the Senate, however.

President Barack Obama included the incentive program in a plan designed to put Americans back to work while improving the environment.